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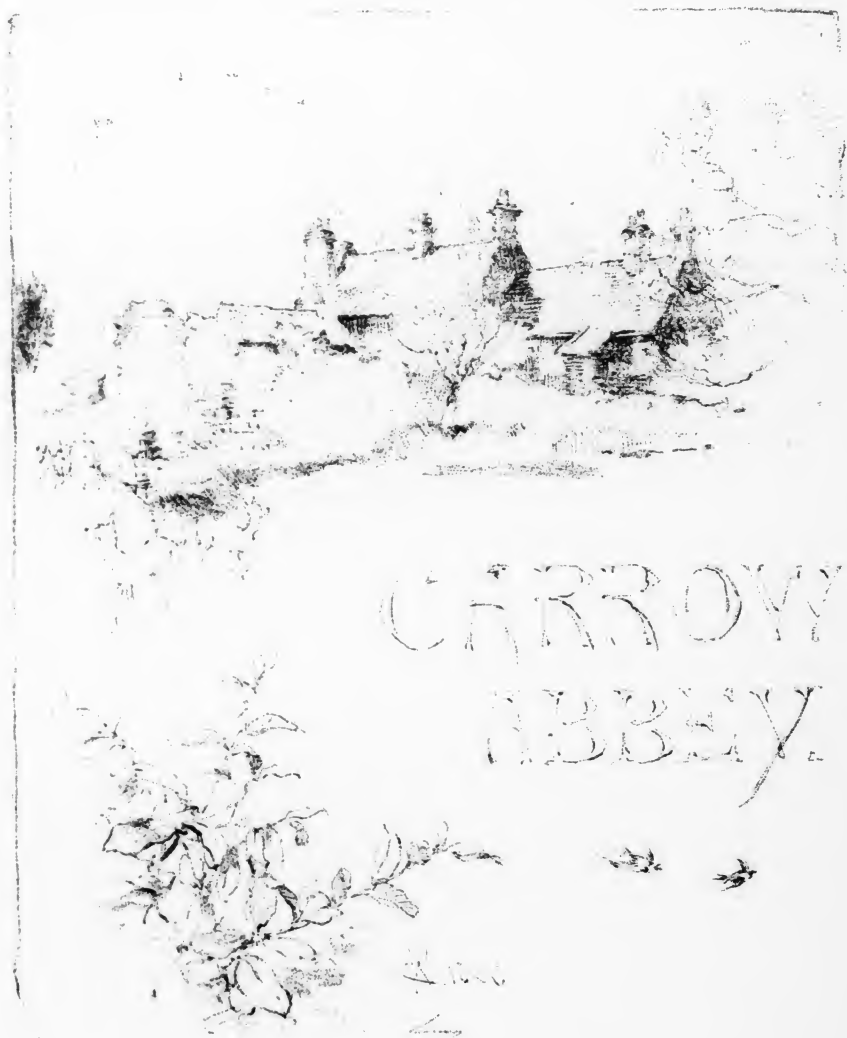
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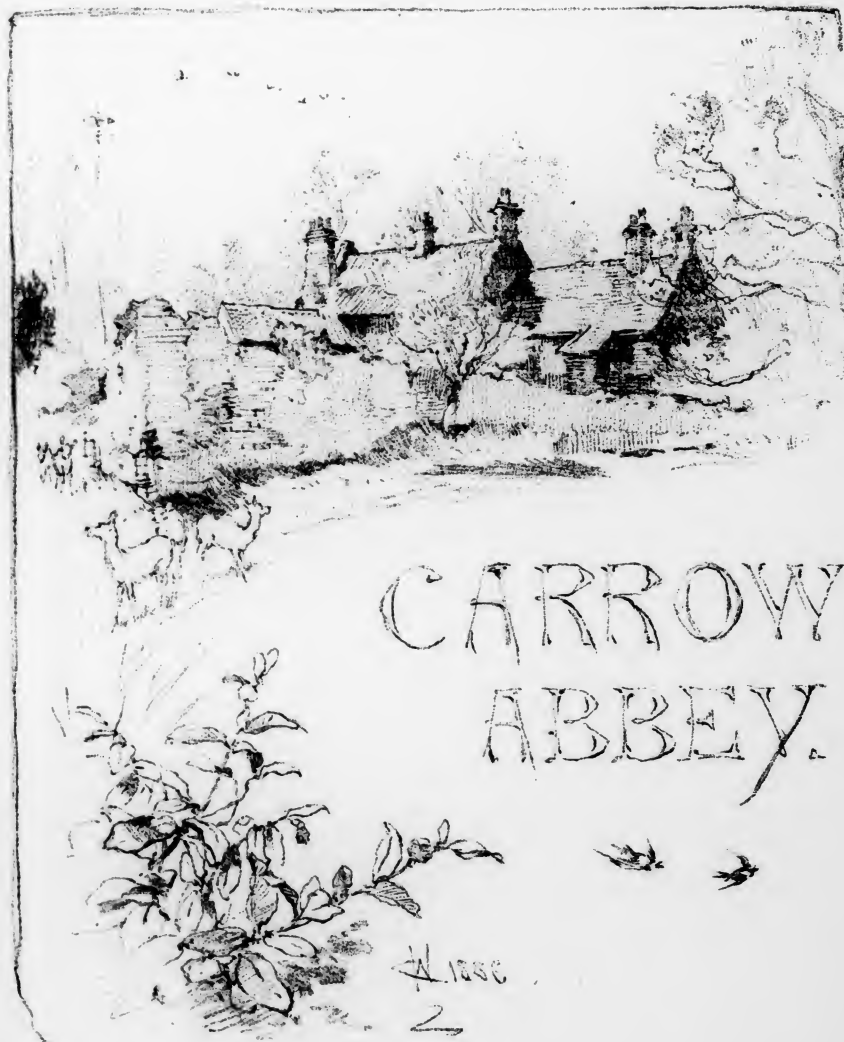
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NOTES
ON
Carrow Priory,
COMMONLY CALLED
Carrow Abbey.

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Carrow Abbey.

WRITING a century and a half ago, the great Norfolk historian Blomefield says, that the Priory Church of Carrow was so totally demolished that it was with difficulty he found its site.

The estate upon which the Church and Priory stood adjoins the Works of Messrs. J. & J. Colman, who acquired it in 1878, for the purpose of using a portion for the enlargement of their business premises, and in 1881 some workmen having accidentally uncovered part of the shaft of a Norman column, considerable interest was excited, and extensive excavations were made. These resulted in the foundations of the greater portion of the buildings being laid bare.

The words *Priory Church* will be at once noticed. By a curious blunder, from very early times, Carrow Priory (for it was never anything more) has been called Carrow *Abbey*.

Carrow was anciently a parish of itself, and had a Church dedicated to St. James the Apostle, before

whose image a light burned during divine service, and at the west door of the church was an image of St. Christopher. It was served by parochial chaplains appointed by the prioress, who received all the profits and paid them for their service. It was still standing in 1556, for in that year Lady Anne, widow of Sir John Shelton, Knight, directed her body to be buried in it.* In Blomefield's time there were no apparent ruins, but, he says, the site was still called the *church-yard*. Where it stood is now a mystery, but, perhaps, near the bottom of Carrow Hill.

Just a word as to the etymology of "Carrow." The name has been spelt in every conceivable way, and its derivation disputed; but its present form seems to carry the true explanation with it. *Car* meant a marshy spot, and *how*, a hill rising above it; and these two words taken together no doubt well expressed the ancient state of the place.

It would seem that King Stephen, by charter, freely gave this meadow in which the Priory stands, and lands around it, to the nuns of a church or hospital dedicated to St. Mary and St. John, in Norwich (now lost sight of †), and desired them to found a church upon it, and in 1146 two of the nuns, Seyna and Lescelina, probably sisters, founded this Benedictine Priory, which consisted at first of a prioress and nine nuns, but had increased

* Rye and Tillett's Account and Description, fol. 33.

† Rye and Tillett, fol. 39.

at the time of the Dissolution to twelve. It was dedicated to the Virgin and St. John, while the Church was dedicated to St. Mary.

In 1199 King John granted the nuns a four-day fair, to be held on the eve and day of the Virgin's nativity and the two following days, by virtue of which they had the toll of all that came through the City. This occasioned disputes, till in 1289 Amabil de Ufford, the prioress, compromised the matter with the citizens.

In 1244 William de Burgh, chaplain to Henry III., was consecrated Bishop of Llandaff here, as was also Walter de Suffield, Bishop of Norwich.

In 1273 Pope Gregory the Tenth, says Blomefield, "inhibited their receiving more nuns than their income would maintain, upon their representation that the English nobility, whom they could not resist, had obliged them to take so many *sisters* in, that they could not support them."

The convent and parish and parts belonging to it in Trowse Millgate and Bracondale were an exempt jurisdiction belonging to the prioress, and in 1327 Nicholas de Cnapton, her chaplain and official of her jurisdiction, proved wills and exercised all spiritual authority whatsoever in it.

In 1385 the Norwich saddlers and spurriers instituted their guild here.

Edith Wilton, prioress in 1395, was prosecuted by the Prior of Norwich and Brother Thomas Roughton,

monk there, for harbouring in sanctuary the murderers of William Koc, of Trowse, at the appeal of Margaret his wife, and was committed to gaol, tried, and acquitted. In this connection it may be remarked that the nuns had, amongst their other *privileges*, a common gallows standing near their windmill, which was situated on the hill by Ber Street Gates.

Later on the nunnery became, it seems, quite an educational establishment for the daughters of the neighbouring gentry, and it is, possibly, to one of these young ladies, a Miss Jane Scrope, that John Skelton, the poet laureate to Henry VIII., and rector of Diss, who died in 1529, refers in his "Litle Boke of Phyllyp Sparow." This young lady is supposed, in the poem, to lament the untimely fate of her pet sparrow, killed by Gilbert, or rather "Gib," the Priory cat. Miss Scrope excommunicates the cat—

"That vengeance I aske and cry
By way of exclamacion,
On al the whole nacion
Of Cattes wilde and tame
God send them sorow and shame;
That Cat specially
That slew so cruelly
My litle prety Sparow
That I brought vp at Carow."*

In 1530 Elizabeth Yaxley left "a clothe of tappestry worke, scored wth the Nativite, Resureccon, and Epiphany, to hange in theyr Church at solempne feestes, to

* Skelton's Works, ed. 1736, fol. 223.

remember myn husbandes soule and myn." She also gave to the prioress a "gylte spone and my clothe of the iij Kynges of Coleyn."*

The names of twenty-two prioresses are recorded, the last being Cecily Stafford, who had a pension of £5 per annum assigned to her at the Dissolution.

The Priory was endowed, according to Dugdale, with revenues to the amount of £54 16s. 4½d. per annum, and according to Speed to the amount of £84 12s. 1½d.; but Blomefield remarks that these sums did not exceed the third part of the real value of its revenues.

Amongst the other possessions of the Priory were the advowsons of the following Norwich Churches—besides the parish church of St. James at Carrow:—All Saints, St. Catherine, St. Julian, and St. Edward, as likewise that of Earlham, etc.

In 1539 the site was granted to Sir John Shelton, who made it his residence. From the Sheltons it passed to Charles Cornwallis, through his marriage with Anne, widow of Sir Ralph Shelton. It was afterwards the property, successively, of Sir Humphrey May, Judith May, widow, Nathaniel Axtell, Robert Moreton, John Drinkwater, Dr. Martineau, Miss Martineau, and now belongs, as already stated, to Messrs. J. & J. Colman.

In 1727 Francis Quarles, brewer, advertises that he is going to live at "Carew-Abbey," and sell "nogg"† there.

Lately the Abbey was the residence of J. H. Tillett, Esq.

* Rye and Tillett, fol. 12. † A kind of strong ale.

The boundary walls of the Priory are still to a large extent standing, and, according to Blomefield, contained within them about ten acres.

The noble church was cruciform, and consisted of a nave 101 feet long and 24 feet 3 inches wide; north and south aisles of similar length, 11 feet wide; a central tower, 32 feet square on the outside; choir and chancel, 62 feet 6 inches by 23 feet wide; a south chapel, dedicated to St. John the Baptist; a north chapel, dedicated to St. Catherine; and north and south transepts, extending 42 feet beyond the tower, and 23 feet wide.* These are Mr. Phipson's measurements, but his views on the extent of the nave westwards are different to those of Mr. Loftus Brock.

The construction of the church was evidently commenced at the east end, and continued from time to time further west. The chancel is entirely Norman. The east wall is externally divided into three bays by stone piers, with columns at their angles, the bays themselves being flint-faced. A plinth can also be traced nearly all round the exterior, and a portion of one with the same divisional projections is visible in the interior, so no doubt there were here three windows. The chancel was approached from the choir by steps, which may still be seen.

In 1531 William Aslak, Esq., was buried between the high altar and the image of Our Lady of Pity.†

The choir (on the south side of which may be seen a

* Mr. Phipson's Notes, fol. 4. † Blomefield, vol. 4, fol. 526.

brick vault) opened on the north side into the chapel of St. Catherine.

[Robert, son of John de Stanford, gave eight acres by this church, and six shillings in rents in Norwich, to find a lamp burning for ever at St. Catherine's altar, in her chapel in the monastery church, by his mother's grave.*] The floor here consists of yellow and red glazed tiles. A wall a little north, and another a little east of this chapel, have wells formed in them, and are puzzling. Two more wells were found to the north of the church.

On the south side the choir opened into St. John the Baptist's chapel. [Here John Dowes requested he might be buried, in 1439.†] This chapel is also Norman and arcaded, but underwent some considerable alteration when the altar was erected, the base of which still stands, hiding some of the original work, and the floor level was partially raised. Four massive piers, the base of one of which remains, supported the central tower; and the base of the rood-loft was met with between the two western piers, while the space between the piers on the south side seems to contain foundations for stalls.

The foundations of the north transept are not now to be traced; but the south transept is also part of the Norman building, as evidenced by much of the work, some of which, however, is Early English. The floor consisted of large red tiles. A small portion of the

* Blomefield, vol. 4, fol. 526. † Rye and Tillett, fol. 12.

south end of this transept seems to have afterwards been partitioned off, for some reason or other, by a wall in which are two doorways. Mr. Loftus Brock thinks this space was obtained for a descending flight of wooden steps from the dormitory into the church, upon the rebuilding of the former.

The Early English sacristy opens into this transept on the east side, and when it was first exposed there was red and blue colouring to be seen on its walls. The cross east wall connecting the sacristy with St. John's chapel, and thus forming a small compartment between them, was a later addition, and Mr. Phipson thinks, may have been a treasury or closet. The flooring of the south aisle seems to have consisted of glazed black and yellow tiles. The nave is Early English, *vide* the beautiful south-east pier; but as to its extent westwards, is puzzling. The walls here have given rise to various conjectures, and Mr. Loftus Brock suggests that a locutory may have stood between the two mural bones of contention. The south doorway here is blocked, and there are traces of arcading, more or less perfect, along the south wall. The north aisle is almost altogether destroyed.

Only one piece of a pattern tile was found: it was stamped in relief, of a reddish-brown colour, and glazed. There were traces of colour on many of the numerous moulded stones found. In one of the wells were found a pair of spurs and a large quern. Whether the roof

of the church had stone groining or not is a matter of conjecture. In 1392 William de Eton left £10 towards covering the nuns' church at Carrow.* The chapel of St. John the Evangelist, on the south side of the church of St. Mary at Carrow, is mentioned in 1438.†

The church is separated from the chapter-house by a narrow passage, called the slype, which has doors entering the south transept, the graveyard and the cloisters, but not the chapter-house itself. There was a circular staircase in the south-east corner. Several graves are to be seen in the graveyard, one having a Purbeck marble slab, with a floriated cross in relief. Outside the south chancel wall a stone coffin was discovered containing the skeleton of a young female. It had evidently been previously disturbed, for the coffin-lid was gone. Other skeletons have been dug up on the north side of the church. The chapter-house was entered from the cloister on the west. Traces remain of a wall-seat here, and there were indications of a raised floor-level to form a dais at the eastern part. It is 22 feet wide by about 42 feet long. The flooring here was of red tiles.

South of the chapter-house is the day-room of the convent, at the north-east corner of which can be seen the foundations of steps. At the back of these steps is a passage, and the remains of *latrina*. This day-room had doubtless a groined roof, many groining stones

* Rye and Tillett, fol. 11. † Ibid. fol. 12.

having been found here. Along the centre of the room were columns; a portion of one of these still exists, this being in fact the very shaft the discovery of which first led to the excavations being made. Several indications of openings for windows and doors are to be found in this room, which is 95 feet long by about 23 feet wide.

The infirmary was probably situated somewhere to the south-east of the day-room, but this has not been excavated. The refectory, kitchen, and other offices were doubtless situated on the south side of the cloister, but are entirely demolished. Fragments of walls have however been found from time to time in this direction.

In 1452 Robert Blyklyng of Norwich left a legacy of twenty marks towards building the *new* dormitory, which, Blomefield says, was finished by contribution about 1460. This dormitory was probably situated over the day-room, as already indicated; but in some priories the dormitories were placed on the western side of the cloisters, in which direction, in all probability, at Carrow stood the original guest-hall, apartments of the prioress, etc., superseded by the building yet to be described.

At the entrance into the south aisle of the church, at the north-east angle of the cloister, is a holy-water stoup.

An anchoress resided in the immediate vicinity of the Priory, but the situation of the anchorage is doubtful. In 1428 Lady Julian Lampet was anchoress.

The fine edifice standing on the west side of the

cloister-garth (now a garden), and commonly called "The Abbey," after undergoing since the Dissolution many fearful and wonderful alterations, to suit the various tastes of successive occupiers, has just been carefully restored to something of its original condition, under the direction of Mr. E. Boardman of Norwich. It was doubtless erected in the time of Isabel Wygan, prioress in 1514, and consists of the strangers' hall, with the parlour of the prioress on the left of it, over which is a chamber, approached by a newel-staircase. The fire-place of the parlour is original, and the mantel has in either spandrel an escutcheon, one being charged with the letter *y*, and the other with a gun, the rebus of Isabel Wygan. The ceiling of this apartment has heavily moulded beams and ribs, and the doors have mouldings of the linen-pattern which prevailed so greatly during this period. The walls are covered with oak-panelling. The entrance to this room on the west has on the exterior the same rebus in the spandrels. The strangers' hall has a handsome open timber roof, with four whole and two half well moulded principal beams, and framed spandrels filled in with perforated cusped tracery. In each of the two southernmost spandrels is a rose; the two next contain the Wygan rebus; the next two have an eagle, the emblem of the Evangelist St. John; the two next the letter *W* crowned, for the Virgin; the next two have shamrocks; and in the two northernmost, the roses are repeated.

On the west side is a large Perpendicular arch and piers, with a rectangular bay window beyond. In Blomefield's time the windows were filled with coats of arms, viz., Shelton (single), Az. a cross or, and Shelton impaling all the following coats:—

1. HARLING.
2. ILLEIGH. Erm. 2 chevs. sa.
3. MELLERS. Az. in a bordure per pale wavy gu. and ar. on a fess of the second betw. 3 crowns or as many masles conjoined of the field.
4. ST. PHILIBERT. Ar. 3 bendlets az.
5. VAUX. Checky ar. and gu.
6. BURTS. Erm. on a chief indented sa. 2 lions rampt. or.
7. GEDDYNG. Ar. 3 mullets sa.
8. UVEDALE. Ar. a cross moline gu.
9. LOWDHAM. Ar. 3 escutcheons sa.
10. COCKFIELD. Az. a cross checky ar. and gu.
11. STAPLETON.
12. BARRET. Ar. a fess betw. 3 mullets sa.
13. UFFORD.
14. BREWSE.
15. CLERE.
16. MARKE. Party per pale erm. and az. a lion rampt. counterchanged a border sa. bezantée.
17. BOLEYN.
18. WODEHOUSE OF WAXHAM. Quarterly erm. and az. in the 2nd and 3rd quarters a leopard's face or qtg. BARROWE.
19. MORLEY.

There were also two escutcheons of Shelton with blank impalements.

In the hall east window were—

SHELTON and BARROW, and Gu. on a cross engr. sa. 5 escallops. . . .

In the west windows were—

BACON, Gu. a boar in fess or qtg. BUTTS. CALTHORPE, Checky or and az. a fess erm. and DRURY, Ar. on a chief vert 2 mullets pierced or. SHELTON and MORLEY. ILLEIGH qtg. WODEHOUSE of Waxham, and REPPES quartered. GAWDY with a crescent for difference imp. BASSINGBORNE and his quarters. WICHINGHAM, Erm. on a chief sa. 3 crosses pattée ar., WALCOTE, PHILIP LORD BARDOLF, and FURNEAUX, Sa. a pale lozengy ar. CORNWALLIS and his quarters, Sa. 3 bars gemel and a canton ar. BRAHAM. JERNEGAN and his quarterings, Gu. a cross engr. ar., Gu. 3 bars gemel or and a canton ar. Ar. a bend betw. 6 crosses crosslet fitchy sa. TYRRELL with a crescent for distinction, . . . a chev. betw. 3 martlets ar. MORTIMER, Or semée-de-lis sa. GONVILLE, Ar. on a chev. betw. 2 couple-closes indented sa. 3 escallops or. KELDON, Gu. a pale reversed erm. Erminoise a lion rampt. ar. JERNEGAN repeated, etc.

All these interesting coats have disappeared. The door by which the offices, etc., are entered has in the spandrels on the exterior the *y* repeated, but here it is ornamented, and the gun is a blunderbuss.*

* See woodcut.

In Blomefield's time there were the following arms "in a room by the gate-house":—

BLENNERHASSETT, Gu. a chev. erm. betw. 3 dolphins naiant embowed ar., LOWDHAM, KELDON, SCALES, . . . a fess dancetté gu. betw. . . . , and Az. a lion ramp. ar. crowned or.

The large common seal of the Priory was inscribed:—

"Sigillvm Sancte Marie de Karowe."

"The impress," says Blomefield, "is the Virgin holding our Saviour, the prioress on her knees before her in her proper habit, with a label from her mouth, on which 'Ave D: Mat.' Over her head is a star and crescent, and a hand pointing at them from a cloud; the star which is near our Saviour's head denotes his Epiphany; and the crescent over her, the increase of his Gospel."

The small common seal had the prioress kneeling before the Virgin and Christ, and was inscribed—

"S' Priorisse et Conventus de Karhowe."

The seal of the *exempt spiritual jurisdiction* of the house had the Virgin enthroned, holding our Saviour in one hand, and a sceptre in the other, and—

"S' Priorisse S. Marie Ecce de Karhowe ad Causas."

The private seal of the prioress had a crucifix, over which were the sun, moon, and stars darkened; on one side the prioress stood, her hands joined and lifted in prayer; and on the other the confessor of the house in the same posture.

The description of these seals is taken from Blomefield; but in the possession of Mr. Fitch is the leaden matrix of another seal, much older and ruder, which was found among the *débris* in St. Paul's Church, Norwich, in 1841, when that church was undergoing reparation.

The Virgin is seated and crowned, and holds the Saviour and a sceptre. It is inscribed—

" + S' Sancte Marie iuxta Norwicv̄."



FLETCHER AND SON, PRINTERS, NORWICH.







